

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 SAB-02 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01  
MCT-01 SY-05 TRSE-00 /087 W  
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P R 092055Z SEP 77  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3684  
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
USSOUTHCOM  
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA POUCH  
AMCONSUL CALI POUCH  
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: ELAB, PINS, ECON, PINT, CO  
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT LOPEZ ATTENDED THE PANAMA CANAL SIGNING CEREMONY, WHICH RECEIVED EXCELLENT PRESS COVERAGE. TRADE UNION LEADERS ANNOUNCED A GENERAL STRIKE FOR SEPTEMBER 14, DESPITE GOC THREATS OF ARRESTS AND DISMISSALS. KIDNAPPINGS AND SOME LABOR-RELATED VIOLENCE OCCURRED IN SEVERAL AREAS. SOMEWHAT LOST IN THE GENERAL STRIKE NEWS WAS THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX DECLINED DURING AUGUST. A NEW POLITICAL GROUP PROPOSED FORMER GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT LOPEZ ATTENDS PANAMA TREATY CEREMONY. PRESIDENT LOPEZ, WHO IS VIEWED LOCALLY AS HAVING PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN FACILITATING THE NEGOTIATION OF THE PANAMA TREATY, ATTENDED THE WASHINGTON SIGNING CEREMONY AND IS EXPECTED BACK IN COLOMBIA  
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SEPTEMBER 11. BOTH THE SIGNING CEREMONY AND THE BILATERAL MEETINGS BETWEEN LOPEZ AND PRESIDENT CARTER RECEIVED EXCELLENT MEDIA COVERAGE. THE US AND PRESIDENT CARTER RECEIVED HIGHLY FAVORABLE COMMENT.

3. GENERAL STRIKE SET FOR SEPTEMBER 14. LEADERS OF THE FOUR NATIONAL LABOR CONFEDERATIONS JOINTLY ANNOUNCED THAT A NATIONWIDE

24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE WILL BE HELD SEPTEMBER 14, DESPITE GOC THREATS TO ARREST STRIKE LEADERS AND DISCHARGE STRIKERS. UNION LEADERS RETALIATED BY THREATENING TO EXTEND THE STOPPAGE PAST 24 HOURS IF THERE ARE LARGE SCALE ARRESTS OR DISMISSALS. THE GOC ALSO PROHIBITED RADIO AND TELEVISION COVERAGE OF NEWS ITEMS RELATING TO STRIKE PLANS OR ACTIVITIES. WHILE THE STRIKE IS EXPECTED TO DISRUPT LOCAL TRANSPORTATION WITHIN URBAN AREAS, AND INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS, IT IS NOT EXPECTED TO AFFECT OTHER SERVICES SUCH AS ELECTRICITY OR TELECOMMUNICATIONS. THE MAJOR QUESTION NOW IS HOW THE SECURITY FORCES WILL REACT TO ATTEMPTS BY EXTREMISTS, INCLUDING STUDENTS AND OUTSIDE AGITATORS, TO FOMENT CLASHES AND DISORDER, AND IF THESE REACTIONS WILL LEAD TO AN ESCALATION IN THE VIOLENCE. WHILE A 24-HOUR STOPPAGE POSES NO THREAT TO GOVERNMENT STABILITY, A PROLONGED SERIES OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS COULD BE HARMFUL TO DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC ORDER. MEANWHILE, THE STRIKE BY ECOPETROL WORKERS CONTINUED, WITH EMPLOYEES OF SUBCONTRACTORS JOINING THE STRIKE AUGUST 8 AFTER AN ALTERCATION BETWEEN A WORKER AND A MILITARY GUARD. THIS COULD JEOPARDIZE THE PRODUCTION OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS. THE IMPRESSION IS THAT BOTH MANAGEMENT AND THE UNION ARE AWAITING THE RETURN OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ TO SETTLE THE ISSUE. THE LABOR FRONT WAS NOT COMPLETELY BLEAK DURING THE WEEK, AS STRIKEING CEMENT WORKERS AND TEACHERS BEGAN TO SETTLE THEIR DISPUTES. AGREEMENTS WERE REACHED WITH THE MAJORITY OF CEMENT COMPANIES, AND PRODUCTION HAS RESUMED. THE GOC ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD CHANGE THE DECREE COVERING TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS, AND OPENED TALKS WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE UNION ON THIS ISSUE AND ON WAGES.

4. PUBLIC ORDER. KIDNAPPINGS AND INCREASED LABOR-RELATED VIOLENCE DOMINATED THE PUBLIC ORDER SCENE. A NUMBER OF PEOPLE, INCLUDING A FORMER GOVERNOR OF MAGDALENA DEPARTMENT AND TWO CHILDREN, WERE KIDNAPPED IN SANTA MARTA BY UNIDENTIFIED GROUPS. THE CHILDREN WERE RESCUED UNHARMED WITHIN A FEW DAYS. A YOUTH, KIDNAPPED IN BARRANQUILLA, WAS ALSO RESCUED AND SEVERAL OF HIS CAPTORS ARRESTED. IN ALL OF THESE CASES, THE KIDNAPPERS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN COMMON CRIMINALS. A MEDICAL DOCTOR, KIDNAPPED BY FARC GUERRILLAS IN CAQUETA DEPARTMENT IN LATE AUGUST, MANAGED TO ESCAPE HIS CAPTORS, BUT THREE BROTHERS KIDNAPPED LAST WEEK IN THE SAME DEPARTMENT REPORTEDLY REMAIN IN FARC HANDS. THE ECO-PETROL STRIKE IN BARRANCABERMEJA BECAME SOMEWHAT MORE VIOLENT AS SEVERAL BOMB ATTEMPTS WERE MADE AGAINST THE HOMES OF COMPANY SUPERVISORS AND OF WORKERS NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE STRIKE. NO SERIOUS INJURIES WERE REPORTED. AS A DEMONSTRATION OF SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE, FARC GUERRILLAS BOMBED AN ECOPETROL PIPELINE LEADING FROM THE STRIKE AREA, BUT THE PIPELINE WAS QUICKLY REPAIRED. IN CALI, THREE BOMBINGS WERE REPORTED ON SEPTEMBER 7. THREE PERSONS WERE INJURED IN A SEARS STORE, BUT NO CASUALTIES RESULTED FROM BOMBINGS AT CALI POLICE HEADQUARTERS AND A PRECINCT STATION.

5. CONSUMER PRICE INDEX DECREASES. THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX FOR WORKERS DECLINED LAST MONTH FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE AUGUST OF 1973. THE INDEX MOVED DOWN .6 PERCENT FOR WORKERS AND INCREASED ONLY .3 PERCENT FOR EMPLOYEES, BRINGING THE TOTAL PRICE MOVEMENT FOR THE YEAR TO 29.4 AND 25.1 PERCENT RESPECTIVELY. INFLATION FOR WORKERS THROUGH AUGUST IS AT A SEASONALLY ADJUSTED RATE OF 38 PERCENT, BUT GOOD CROPS IN THE LAST QUARTER COULD REDUCE THE YEAR-END FIGURE A POINT OR TWO. GOOD HARVESTS IN JULY AND AUGUST, PARTICULARLY IN THOSE STAPES WHICH FIGURE LARGE IN THE MARKET BASKET OF THE POOR, AND SIGNIFICANT FOODSTUFF IMPORTS ARE THE PRIMARY CAUSES FOR THE PRICE DECLINE LAST MONTH. HOWEVER, CLOTHING AND MISCELLANEOUS CATEGORIES IN THE WORKERS' BASKET INCREASED BY 2.3 AND 1.7 PERCENT, INDICATING THAT INFLATION IS CLEARLY NOT YET LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHIPPED.

6. EX-GENERAL MAY ENTER PRESIDENTIAL RACE. FORMER ARMY COMMANDER ALVARO VALENCIA TOVAR HAS BEEN PROPOSED AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BY A NEW POLITICAL MOVEMENT, THE UNIQUE PATRIOTIC FRONT (FUP). THE NEW MOVEMENT, WHICH DESCRIBES ITSELF AS A FEDERATION OF DISPARATE GROUPS, PROCLAIMED VALENCIA TO BE "THE LEADER AND STANDARD-BEARER OF THE MORALIZATION (OF THE NATION) AND THE GUARANTEE OF CHANGE TO ESTABLISH SOCIAL JUSTICE, ORDER, AND ADMINISTRATIVE HONESTY." COMMENT: ALTHOUGH VALENCIA HAS NOT YET ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTIONS, HE IS BEGINNING TO ACT LIKE A CANDIDATE. THE FORMER GENERAL HAS NO PREVIOUS POLITICAL EXPERIENCE, BUT DOES ENJOY A CERTAIN BROAD APPEAL AS A MODERATE, AND MAY BE SEEKING TO POSITION HIMSELF FOR A CANDIDACY IN 1982, WHEN THE COMPETITION COULD BE WEAKER. THE NON-PARTISAN VALENCIA, WHO IS THOUGHT PERSONALLY TO FAVOR THE CANDIDACY OF EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS, MAY ALSO SEE HIMSELF AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO JULIO CESAR TURBAY SHOULD THE LATTER DEFEAT LLERAS FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY NOMINATION IN 1978. JOHNSON

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## Message Attributes

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